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Chairman: Mr. KALPAGE (Sri Lanka)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.1(p.m.

AGENDA ITEM 85: UNITED NATIONS RELIEF AND WORKS AGENCY FOR PALESTINE REFUGEES IN THE NEAR EAST (A/48/13 and Add.1 and Add.1/Corr.1, A/48/275, 372-377, 431 and 554)

1. Mr. TÜRKMEN (Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA)), introducing his annual report for the period 1992 to 1993 (A/48/13), said that the Agency was meeting with the Committee in a completely different political environment. The mutual recognition by the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and the Government of Israel and the signing of a Declaration of Principles which was guiding their negotiations on an interim self-government in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank had already had a great impact on the role UNRWA must play in the long term and in the short term.

2. In the long term, one of the issues to be addressed, after the interim arrangement for the West Bank and the Gaza Strip was in place, was the resolution of the refugee problem. Negotiations on that issue were to begin not later than two years after the start of the interim period. Until a final agreement was concluded, UNRWA would continue to function in Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic. In the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, the situation would in principle be no different, since the refugee problem would not be politically resolved until a later stage. Nevertheless, the establishment of a Palestinian authority would put UNRWA in a radically different position, for it would continue its activities to the extent requested by the Palestinian authority, and in close coordination and consultation with it.

3. The PLO had indicated its desire to see UNRWA continue its programmes of assistance for Palestine refugees, including those in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, and had asked the Agency to expand the programmes to promote social and economic development. UNRWA had been reflecting on its own role since the start of the peace negotiations in Madrid two years earlier, and thus, when the peace process had taken a big leap forward in September, it had had no difficulty in adapting and had been able to respond to the immediate need to promote social and economic development in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. One reason why UNRWA had been able to make that transition relatively smoothly was its large Palestinian staff of some 200,000, many of whom were in senior management positions in education, health and social services, and had remained in contact with their Palestinian counterparts to assist them in the preparation of plans and programmes. Another reason was that, over the years, UNRWA had been in charge of planning, preparing, implementing and administering its own projects and programmes, and it was now gathering the fruits of the rich experience its staff had accumulated.

4. Since the annual report covered a period pre-dating the signing of the Declaration of Principles, a preface had been added referring to the events that had taken place in September, because they would have such a great impact on the region and hence on UNRWA. The Declaration of Principles and the current negotiations were a turning-point in the history of the region. The entire United Nations system would be called upon to play a role, and the Secretary-General had already in September 1993 established a task force which

(Mr. Türkmen)

had produced a report entitled "Supporting the transition", which emphasized the importance of concentrating United Nations assistance to the West Bank and the Gaza Strip on maintaining and upgrading public services and improving the basic infrastructure and related social services. In the context of the objectives defined in that report, UNRWA had developed short-term projects to improve the services and infrastructure in the area, and those activities could help sustain the momentum of the positive change set in motion by the signing of the Declaration of Principles.

5. A substantial response by the international community was necessary if the peace process was to be bolstered by social and economic development. The Conference to Support Middle East Peace, held in Washington on 1 October 1993, was a landmark in that it had mobilized resources to be channelled for relief and development and had symbolized the commitment of the international community.

6. In consultation with the Palestinian leaders, UNRWA had developed a peace implementation programme, under which it had identified nearly 100 short-term projects costing $100 million for the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The projects, which could be implemented within six to nine months, aimed to improve services, physical infrastructure and social services and to create new employment opportunities for the 40 per cent of the workforce idle since the closure of the occupied territory. The activities included school repairs, the repair of centres for women's programmes and youth activities, and the repair and reconstruction of shelters in refugee camps. Health clinics would undergo maintenance, and projects would be started to address the extensive environmental health problems, especially in the Gaza Strip. UNRWA had begun to do a series of feasibility studies to plan the long-term development of the environmental health sector; and in the short term, it was proposing to improve solid waste disposal and water supply.

7. In the area of income generation, UNRWA had made plans to expand its programme of loans to Palestinian businesses, and hoped to help businesses requiring capital beyond the current $70,000-ceiling. In addition, training programmes for owners of small and medium-sized businesses would be expanded.

8. All the Agency's short-term projects shared certain characteristics: they could be implemented within a six- to nine-month period, they promoted economic and social advancement, they were in sectors in which UNRWA had long experience, they provided vital services to the Palestinian community, and they offered new job opportunities. The short-term projects were being carried out in addition to ongoing construction projects costing some $60 million.

9. The main task of UNRWA was to see its present and proposed projects through to completion. The Agency was pleased at the initial response of the donor community and at the confidence that the World Bank and donors had shown in its ability to plan and implement projects rapidly, effectively and economically. It was currently embarking on planning and project preparation for the second

(Mr. Türkmen)

year of the transition period, and it hoped that other agencies would also begin to implement substantial programmes in their areas of competence.

10. He pointed out that the Agency's programmes were carried out in cooperation with other organizations. Accordingly, its health programme, which had resources of $64 million for 1993, was coordinated with the World Health Organization (WHO). The Agency's senior health staff at headquarters were seconded from WHO which also supported its programme for human resources development in health. Similarly, its senior education staff at headquarters, who were responsible for managing 1993 education resources of over $151 million, were seconded from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). For many decades, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) had underwritten the Agency's expanded programme of immunization with the supply of free vaccines. Since 1988, UNRWA and UNICEF had had a joint physiotherapy programme in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. UNRWA had worked with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) on a number of environmental health matters and would expand its cooperation in that sector, especially in the West Bank. It was working with the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) in an expanded maternal health and family planning project in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

11. The impact of the Agency's ongoing programmes was long term. UNRWA was involved in the daily lives of the Palestinians in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip in many ways. For example, it was the largest employer after the Israeli civil service, as it employed 8,000 people in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip: all Palestinians and the majority themselves refugees. Its 1993 budget and expenditures in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip totalled over $135 million. Its spending on education, health and relief and social services in the occupied territory accounted for nearly half of total public expenditure: 68 per cent in the Gaza Strip and 31 per cent in the West Bank. The more than 1 million registered refugees represented 78 per cent of the population of the Gaza Strip and 40 per cent of the population of the West Bank. UNRWA ran 253 schools which provided 56 per cent of all elementary and preparatory education in the Gaza Strip and 17 per cent in the West Bank. It also ran four vocational training centres; 52 clinics that treated 2 million patients per year, 40 women's programme centres and 19 youth activity centres. It provided 95 per cent of all direct relief assistance in the Gaza Strip and 75 per cent in the West Bank. It had introduced an income-generation and job-creation programme through which it had already disbursed $3 million. Because of its presence in the lives of Palestinians, the Agency had been able to respond immediately to new challenges posed by war and conflict and, now, peace.

12. He said that recent political events must be paralleled by rapid improvement in the conditions of Palestinians living in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. UNRWA seemed to be one of the main international agencies through which substantial funds could be efficiently channelled in support of the peace process. However, while international attention was focused on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, overlooking the needs of the 1.7 million Palestinian refugees in Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic could harm the peace

(Mr. Türkmen)

process. The Agency had therefore welcomed the donor response to its plea, particularly the pledge of $1.5 million announced by the United States Government for the construction of housing for displaced Palestinians in Lebanon.

13. With respect to the Agency's financial situation, earlier in the year it had anticipated a shortfall of $28.5 million which had been reduced by austerity measures to $4 million. However, unless contributions to the regular budget and emergency-related programmes increased, UNRWA would face a shortfall of $30 million in 1994 and $35 million in 1995. The Agency hoped that donors would contribute to its regular and special programmes, because they would be contributing to the peace process. It also hoped that the number of donors would increase.

14. In order to streamline its operations and make them more effective, the Agency was moving its programme departments from Vienna to Amman, Jordan. In connection with the resolution requesting the return of UNRWA headquarters to Beirut, contacts had been established with the Lebanese authorities with a view to a possible move.

15. He wished to reiterate that UNRWA was in constant contact with the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and Palestinian community leaders. It also maintained very good working relations with the Government of Israel, which had expressed a wish to see UNRWA continue and expand its operations. However, if a settlement was reached at the close of the interim period, there would no longer be a need for an organization established to assist the Palestinian refugees. The Agency was coming to the end of the task entrusted to it 40 years earlier, and its main concern would be to complete that task as successfully as possible.

16. Mr. SEIM (Norway), speaking in his capacity as Rapporteur of the Working Group on the Financing of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), introduced its report (A/48/554). He said that, in accordance with its mandate, the Group had considered the information provided by the Comptroller of UNRWA on the Agency's financial situation and 1994 requirements and had formulated its concluding remarks, which were contained in section IV of the report.

17. The Working Group stressed that UNRWA had failed to receive funding sufficient enough to deliver all of its planned programmes in 1992 and that it expected the same situation to prevail in 1993. It also pointed to the difficulties which the Agency had experienced in maintaining the level of contributions required for the programme of extraordinary measures in Lebanon and the occupied territory (EMLOT) and remarked that the urgent needs emphasized in the Commissioner-General's two special appeals had not been fully addressed. It commended the Commissioner-General for his fund-raising efforts and shared his concern about funding prospects for 1994. Expenditure under the regular

(Mr. Seim, Norway)

programme was expected to increase by 5 per cent in order to meet the needs of a growing number of beneficiaries and to cover unavoidable increases in prices and staff costs. While the Working Group was confident that the Commissioner-General would continue improving administrative efficiency, contributions would have to increase in order to cover expected expenditure in 1993. The Working Group was particularly concerned at the level of funding for emergency-related programmes because their discontinuation or reduction could have disturbing humanitarian and political consequences.

18. The Group commended the Agency for its response to new and continuing humanitarian needs and for the measures it planned, particularly in the area of job-creation and income-generating projects. The Working Group urged all Governments to bear in mind the foregoing considerations when deciding upon the level of their contributions to UNRWA for 1994. In particular, it urged Governments that had not yet contributed to UNRWA to do so, and those that had to increase their contributions and consider contributing additional funds in support of emergency-related and special programmes.

19. Mr. AL-KIDWA (Observer for Palestine) said that about 45 years previously the existing 2.8 million Palestinian refugees, or their parents, had been uprooted from their country and forced to live in tents in the surrounding areas. Half the Palestinian people lived as refugees and one third of them were in refugee camps scattered throughout the occupied Palestinian territory and the neighbouring States.

20. From the start the international community had adopted a clear position, calling for an immediate and just solution for the Palestine refugees on the basis of the right of return or compensation, as defined in General Assembly resolution 194 (III). Unfortunately the General Assembly noted annually, with regret, that the resolution had not been complied with. In that connection he emphasized the inalienable and individual nature of the rights of Palestine refugees and the need to differentiate between those rights and the right of every single Palestinian to Palestinian nationality and citizenship.

21. Over those years, UNRWA had made great strides in dealing with the humanitarian aspects of the problem, specifically with regard to relief, health care and, most importantly, education.

22. On 13 September 1993 a momentous development towards the achievement of a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East had taken place in Washington, when the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and the Government of Israel had signed a Declaration of Principles providing for interim self-government arrangements in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, beginning with an Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and the Jericho area. The Declaration had also provided for negotiations on the final settlement, on the basis of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), to include the issue of the refugees. The Declaration of Principles also took into account the situation of the displaced persons of 1967 and provided for the establishment of a continuing committee that would decide, inter alia, the modalities for the

(Mr. Al-Kidwa, Observer, Palestine)

admission of persons displaced from the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The international community should support such positive developments and at the same time reaffirm its position of principle with regard to the rights of the Palestine refugees in accordance with international legitimacy and continue to provide the necessary assistance until a final settlement materialized.

23. The signing of the Declaration of Principles had given a new impetus to the work of the multilateral groups derived from the Madrid peace process. At the latest meeting of the group dealing with the refugee problem a successful attempt had been made to accelerate family reunification and the importance of assisting all Palestine refugees had been emphasized.

24. The new situation created by the recent political developments required that additional efforts and certain adjustments should be made in the work that was being done. The United Nations should play a major role over the coming period of time, including the provision of assistance to the Palestinian people in their nation-building efforts. UNRWA should intensify its programmes of assistance. The PLO intended to broaden its discussions with UNRWA so as to coordinate future cooperation between the two sides. Serious consideration should also be given to moving certain parts of UNRWA, especially the operational departments, to Palestinian territory. That would help to reduce expenses while continuing to allow for the provision of quality assistance to the Palestinian people. The PLO commended the efforts of the Secretary-General to establish an advanced coordinating mechanism among the interested organizations and agencies of the United Nations system and hoped that it would be placed under his direct supervision.

25. After quoting from the report of the Commissioner-General of UNRWA (A/48/13), which referred to UNRWA's efforts to provide for the safety and security of the Palestinian population in the occupied territory, he expressed his appreciation of those efforts; they had helped to alleviate the consequences of the oppressive measures against civilians, including children, the destruction of homes, the use of undercover units and the closure of areas in the occupied territories, particularly Jerusalem. He also drew attention to the section of the report dealing with Israeli violations against UNRWA's staff, operations and installations. UNRWA and the international community should keep the situation under close scrutiny.

26. He also noted the grave deterioration in the socio-economic situation which basically resulted from Israeli occupation policies and practices in the occupied Palestinian territory. In the light of the new political circumstances, the PLO hoped that it would be able to join the Advisory Commission in order to contribute directly to its work; the PLO stood ready to work with all Member States that wanted to improve the traditional resolutions adopted by the General Assembly on the agenda item under discussion, making them more responsive to the new situation, but without undermining fundamental positions of principle.

(Mr. Al-Kidwa, Observer, Palestine)

27. On the day marking the fifth anniversary of the Declaration of Independence by the Palestine National Council, which had been acknowledged by the General Assembly in its resolution 43/177, and in the light of recent political developments there were reasons for hope, including hope for the just solution of the problem of the Palestine refugees, and new opportunities that should be seized.

28. Mr. BATAINEH (Jordan) said that he had studied document A/48/13 and that the Government of Jordan welcomed the Commissioner-General's decision to continue the various UNRWA programmes, as well as UNRWA's achievement in providing the Palestinians with vital services efficiently in very difficult and complex circumstances. Jordan was aware that full use should be made of the profound knowledge and experience of Mr. Türkmen, whose name had become a symbol of UNRWA's greater administrative, financial and qualitative efficiency, as the Agency entered on the new and decisive stage of its work.

29. In 1993, for the first time, the subject of UNRWA was under consideration in the context of positive developments on the Palestine question, which would lead to a new era in the region and make it possible to increase the quantity and quality of UNRWA's activities. The recognition of each other by the Government of Israel and the PLO, the signing of the Declaration of Principles and the agreement between the Governments of Jordan and Israel on the issues which would serve as a basis for negotiations in the peace process had together brought about a general atmosphere of optimism and confidence over the progress in the peace process.

30. Jordan believed the cause of the Palestine refugees to be a sacred one; it understood their prolonged suffering and would continue its contribution to establishing reasonable negotiations within the framework of the peace process and in all international forums, setting aside everything that would not be relevant to the current situation. It was, however, clear that such an outcome would be achieved only if the Israeli occupation authorities began to act differently. There were encouraging signs in that direction and Jordan hoped that there would be more.

31. The Commissioner-General's report (A/48/13) reaffirmed the vital need to achieve an overall political settlement covering all aspects of the Palestine question, in particular by resolving the political and humane dimension of the Palestine refugee problem, in accordance with the United Nations Charter, international law and the relevant United Nations resolutions.

32. His country's growing interest in the question of Palestine refugees was due partly to the fact that it had taken in the greatest number of refugees and had since 1948 been affected by the increasing burden on its infrastructure and finances. The international community had not allocated to UNRWA the funds it needed in order to deliver minimum services to Palestine refugees. Jordan had taken on the responsibility of providing direct services, costing 120 million Jordanian dinars a year, amounting to over half of UNRWA's budget, to attend to outstanding needs, despite its own difficult economic situation.

(Mr. Bataineh, Jordan)

Not providing the necessary funds to support UNRWA's work resulted in the deterioration of economic, social and health conditions for the Palestine people and led to increased desperation and extremism.

33. He emphasized his conviction that UNRWA's mandate would continue until the refugee problem was resolved within the framework of a just and peaceful settlement of all aspects of the Palestine question, along with measures to guarantee the rights of Palestine refugees in all territories under Israeli occupation since 1967 and a recognition of the inalienable right of all refugees to return to their former places of residence in those territories. It was also necessary to move UNRWA's headquarters to the region to facilitate implementation of its programme. In the light of recent developments, it might be appropriate for it to be in Gaza.

34. Mrs. FRIEDRICH (Austria) said that UNRWA had provided vital services in the fields of education, health, social services and relief to more than 2.8 million refugees in Lebanon, Jordan, the Syrian Arab Republic and the Occupied Territories of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, which were reflected in its report. She expressed regret about the incidents of mistreatment that threatened the safety of UNRWA staff in the region.

35. She noted with concern the deplorable socio-economic consequences that had followed the closure of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, as well as the serious deterioration of the political climate and security, and expressed the hope that the negotiations would help improve the situation. The Agency, which was already facing a difficult situation had, in addition, seen a decrease in the contributions that it received. In recent years, her Government, which was one of the major donors, had increased its annual contributions to the UNRWA budget and had provided assistance programmes to the Palestinians with the help of religious and private institutions and through the Austrian cooperation budget. In 1992, its contributions to Palestinian assistance programmes had come to US$ 2,751,000. She encouraged all States to provide UNRWA with the financial support it needed.

36. In a commendable effort to support peace talks regarding the Israeli-Palestinian Declaration of Principles, the Agency had presented both background information and specific project proposals for the Gaza Strip and the West Bank with the aim of improving the economic and social situation and creating the necessary institutional infrastructure. Her Government had welcomed the Israeli-Palestinian agreement, and hoped that it would live up to the expectations it had created and that it would contribute to a considerable improvement in living conditions of the Palestinian people.

37. Archbishop MARTINO (Observer for the Holy See) said that with the exchange of letters of recognition and the signing in Washington of the Declaration of Principles between the State of Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization, a new era had dawned in the areas served by the Agency. As His Holiness Pope John Paul II had noted on 12 September 1993, there was another special reason to offer a fervent prayer, since after a long period of

(Archbishop Martino, Observer, Holy See)

suffering, important signs of the desire for peace in the Holy Land and the Middle East were becoming evident.

38. His delegation applauded those first steps that would bring peace to the land which Jews, Christians and Muslims considered sacred, and agreed with Prime Minister Rabin who, in his statement, had called, in a loud and clear voice, for an end to all suffering and bloodshed. The Catholic Church, working through the Pontifical Mission for Palestine, which had been founded in 1949 by Pope Pius XII, had served to feed, house and educate victims of conflicts, as well as to care for those in need of medical assistance. Those programmes, sometimes in collaboration with UNRWA, had been supported by generous donors worldwide, including the Catholic Near East Welfare Association, Miserior, Missio, Kinderhilfen Bethlehem, Caritas Internationalis and the Archdioceses of Cologne and Osaka. Those donors, working with local churches, had sought to establish an adequate infrastructure to maintain stable family and community relationships.

39. In view of the long-standing history of the region, his delegation recognized the importance of supporting those first steps of the peace agreement. At the signing of the agreement, Chairman Arafat had noted that more courage would be needed to continue the course of building coexistence and peace between the two peoples. In fact, many difficult issues remained to be resolved, one of them being the status of Jerusalem. As Archbishop Jean-Louis Tauran had noted, Jerusalem represented a good for humanity to be preserved in all its dimensions and characteristics. To that end, the Holy Sea requested that the city should be given special status with international guarantees.

40. In his message for World Day for peace, His Holiness Pope John Paul II had said that peace was much more than the simple absence of war and that it postulated a condition of authentic respect for the dignity and rights of every human being, a condition enabling him or her to achieve complete fulfilment. The Holy See would therefore continue its efforts to assist communities through the churches to address the needs of those still suffering, so that the seeds of peace might germinate.

41. Mrs. ZIDMUNDOVA (Belgium), speaking on behalf of the European Union, recalled that the Commissioner-General of UNRWA had said in his report that although the information it contained applied to the period covered by the report, that information should be assessed within the context of the evolution of the peace process, and expressed the hope that the consequences of that period would permanently disappear. She also agreed with the Commissioner-General that the signing of the peace agreement that year had been crucial. The European Union praised the Israeli and Palestinian leaders for their courage and vision in signing the agreement.

42. During the period covered by the report, the Palestinian people had encountered serious social and economic difficulties as a result of the prolonged closure of the Occupied Territories. That situation had tested

(Mrs. Zidmundova, Belgium)

UNRWA's ability to address the urgent needs of an ever-growing number of refugees. Unfortunately, the tragic wave of violence in the region had affected UNRWA staff working in the occupied territories. Since its creation in 1949, the agency had alleviated the plight of more than 2.5 million Palestinian refugees. She pointed out that it was also continuing its efforts to increase aid to Lebanese refugees, and to strengthen its presence in Jordan.

43. The European Union had always considered the aid provided by UNRWA as being, by definition, provisional in nature and not a substitute for a durable political solution. Accordingly, it was essential that the international community should undertake to provide substantial aid in order to bolster the courageous decisions currently being taken. Similarly, the European Union would seek to coordinate and actively promote the relief efforts of the various donors.

44. In accordance with its well known basic position, which included support for Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), the European Union was determined to take an active role in the peace process which had begun in Madrid, both at the political and at the economic level and, therefore, was willing to immediately provide an aid programme of 20 million ECU (approximately 24 million US dollars), and it expected to provide a substantial amount in grants and loans to the occupied territories during the next five years.

45. In the context of its own foreign policy and collective security, the European Union planned to contribute to the peace process in the Near East by mobilizing political, economic and financial means in support of a broad peace plan.

46. It was clear that UNRWA had henceforth to make a decisive contribution, mainly within the framework of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the occupied territories, to give new impetus to the economic and social stability of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. Thus, UNRWA should, as rapidly as possible, take its place within the secretariat of that Committee. The European Union had also noted with interest the proposals concerning supplementary assistance projects for the inhabitants of the occupied territories elaborated by the inter-agency task force established by the Secretary-General, and the important role UNRWA would play in the implementation of those projects.

47. The European Union was convinced that the experience and knowledge of UNRWA would be used to full advantage during the transfer of authority from the Israeli military Government and its civil administration to the Palestinians appointed by the new administration. Continued assistance to Palestinian refugees in other countries of the region should undoubtedly remain a primary concern.

48. The European Union, which hoped that in the near future UNRWA assistance would no longer be essential, was concerned that the Agency lacked a solid financial base from which it could continue to provide its services. The Union, which made the highest net contribution to the occupied territories, also made

(Mrs. Zidmundova, Belgium)

the highest contribution to the UNRWA regular budget and substantial contributions to emergency and other programmes. For the period 1993 to 1995, its contribution would amount to some 94 million ECUs (US$ 112 million). During the current year, it had provided US$ 36 million for activities in the fields of education, health and nutrition. In addition, in 1993 it had contributed US$ 26 million to development programmes and emergency assistance operations. During the current year, the total individual contributions of the States members of the European Union to the UNRWA regular budget had reached more than US$ 48.5 million. She urged other States which had contributed to UNRWA in the past to increase their support for efforts to bring peace and prosperity to the region.

49. Mr. BATU (Turkey) said that he fully shared the hope expressed by the Commissioner-General that his report covered an era which had gone forever (A/48/13, preface). He looked forward to the Agency's new role as a major contributor to the social and economic development of the Palestinians of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The irreversible momentum already achieved had to be maintained so that complete and lasting peace and security in the region could be achieved, within the framework of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

50. The Israeli-Palestinian agreements could bear fruit only if the Palestinians were given the chance to develop a viable economic infrastructure, which would serve not only as a foundation for the Palestinian nation but also as a means of easing political tensions in the region and further promoting the cause of regional peace and stability. In that connection, he cited paragraph 35 of document A/48/13. In that context, Turkey was prepared to offer its renewed support and contribute to the development of the Palestinian infrastructure in the fields of transportation, telecommunications, environment, housing and construction. It could also provide services and facilities in the areas of banking, finance, agriculture and tourism and was prepared to provide technical assistance and training in various fields ranging from health care to food processing. With its wide experience in resettlement activities, Turkey was also in a good position to make contributions in that field.

51. At the recent meeting of the Ad Hoc Working Group on Early Warning regarding New Flows of Refugees and Displaced Persons, held in Tunisia, his country had proposed that a project should be initiated for vocational training and job placement for Palestinian refugees and had pledged US$ 52 million at the donor conference held in Washington, D.C.

52. An integrated programme of assistance for the West Bank and Gaza Strip with the participation of other United Nations agencies would be meaningful only if recognition were given to the importance of the role of UNRWA and to its efforts over the past 45 years, in extremely difficult circumstances, to provide education, relief and medical services to the 2.8 million Palestinian refugees living in that region. The Agency's staff members were among the most experienced and dedicated of those serving in the field. Now that the working conditions for UNRWA seemed to have improved definitively, it was time for the

(Mr. Batu, Turkey)

various parties in the region, with the generous support of the international community, to join together in helping UNRWA to meet the new challenges of the future.

53. The primary role of UNRWA in the reconstruction and rehabilitation process should be recognized, since the Agency had been providing services to the Palestinian population in the region for decades. In accordance with the growing importance of UNRWA, its financial needs for new short-term activities should be met. The situation of the Palestinian refugees in Jordan, Lebanon and Syria should also be taken into account; projects for improving the standard of living of Palestinian refugees in the West Bank and Gaza Strip should not be undertaken at the expense of projects for Palestinian refugees elsewhere. Lastly, multilateral activities in the region should be increased and coordination mechanisms should be established to determine the most efficient and cost-effective way for the various United Nations agencies to implement new assistance programmes.

54. In his capacity as Chairman of the Working Group on the Financing of UNRWA, he pointed out that the Agency's financial situation was the common responsibility of all States Members of the United Nations. Each Member State should bear its fair share of that common responsibility, even if the contributions of some countries were modest. Governments that had not yet contributed to UNRWA should make an effort to do so and Governments that had already contributed should increase their share.

55. Mr. SALMI (Finland), speaking on behalf of the Nordic countries, said that he applauded the direct negotiations carried out recently between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) under the auspices of Norway, which had led to the signing on 13 September 1993 of the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements. That Declaration was an important first step towards a lasting and comprehensive settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict and the question of Palestine and had opened up unprecedented possibilities for the entire Middle East.

56. Nevertheless, the peace process was still at a delicate stage. In order to ensure that it stayed on track, forward-looking measures were needed to improve the situation of the Palestinian people and the necessary financing should be obtained rapidly. Neither time nor resources should be wasted on uncoordinated activities. The Nordic countries were pleased that the international community had pledged generously at the meeting of donor countries at Washington, D.C. on 1 October 1993; at the same time, they wished to stress that, in using such assistance, the expertise of the United Nations agencies already engaged in operational activities in the occupied territories should be fully utilized. In that connection, UNRWA should continue to play a basic role, in particular in short-term activities, given its vast experience and long-standing presence in the region.

57. With regard to the report of UNRWA, the Nordic countries noted with concern that the Agency's financial prospects for 1993 were unfavourable because the

(Mr. Salmi, Finland)

growth in the level of contributions was not keeping pace with the growth in the number of beneficiaries of UNRWA programmes and their rising costs. The lack of funding and the difficult conditions, especially in the West Bank, Gaza Strip and Lebanon, were affecting the Agency's educational, health care and other programmes. Although UNRWA had continued to strive to maintain and even improve the services it provided, the rising quality of the education given in UNRWA schools in Jordan bore witness to the fact that stable conditions were essential for the proper delivery of those services. It was also encouraging to note that where conditions had permitted, income-generation programmes had expanded rapidly. The Nordic countries supported the view that UNRWA must maintain its services to Palestinian refugees in all its fields of operation, i.e. the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, Lebanon, the Syrian Arab Republic and Jordan.

58. As major donors to UNRWA, the Nordic countries were encouraged by the fact that new countries had joined in assisting the Palestinian refugees. In that regard, they would especially welcome increased participation by the countries of the region.

59. Despite the current promising political situation in the Middle East, continuing acts of violence remained a question of great concern. Lasting solutions to political and economic problems could be achieved only through peaceful means, i.e. negotiations, confidence-building measures and economic and social development. The Nordic countries appealed to all parties to break the vicious circle of violence and reprisals.

60. A matter of special concern was the safety of the staff of UNRWA and other international organizations. In that connection, the Nordic countries welcomed the fact that UNRWA and the Israeli authorities had arrived at a good working relationship and a spirit of understanding. It was crucial that that good relationship should continue. Despite the enormous work that lay ahead and the many obstacles that remained, there was reason to hope that the situation of the Palestinian people would improve. The Nordic countries would also hope that the Committee would do its share, through concrete action and by ensuring that the resolutions to be adopted reflected the current situation.

61. Mr. XIE Yunilang (China) said that the report of the Commissioner-General of UNRWA (A/48/13) indicated that in the wake of over 40 years of war and conflict, the Palestinian people were living under extremely difficult conditions and their situation was deteriorating. The increase in the number of refugees demonstrated that the problem of the Palestinian refugees had not been resolved. His delegation had also noted the enormous difficulties that UNRWA had encountered since 1992. Despite the harsh conditions, UNRWA had done a great deal of useful work, from which many Palestinian refugees had benefited. His delegation expressed its appreciation and admiration to the entire staff of UNRWA for their dedication and achievements.

(Mr. Xie Yunilang, China)

62. The agreement recently signed between the PLO and the Government of Israel on mutual recognition and the issue of Palestinian autonomy was merely the beginning of the settlement of the Middle East question; however, it represented a major breakthrough for resolving the situation in conformity with the fundamental interests of the Palestinian and Israeli peoples. It also suggested that a final settlement of the question of Palestine and of the Middle East question as a whole could be achieved through negotiation. China wholeheartedly welcomed those developments.

63. His Government had therefore consistently advocated a political settlement of the Middle East question, in accordance with the relevant resolutions of the United Nations, in particular Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), China also believed that the occupied Arab territories should be returned and the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people restored. At the same time, the sovereignty and security of all countries in the Middle East, including Israel, should be respected and guaranteed. China supported the Middle East peace process and was prepared to work with other Member States of the Organization, in particular the Middle Eastern countries, to achieve a comprehensive peace in that region at an early date. For many years, his Government had provided to the best of its ability assistance to the Palestinian people, through UNRWA and it had decided to continue its contributions to UNRWA in 1994.

64. Mrs. DUKULY-TOLBERT (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)) said that UNESCO provided assistance to the Palestinian people through a number of regular programme activities and special projects.

65. The UNRWA/UNESCO cooperation programme provided staff comprising 12 posts, P-4 through D-2 levels, to the UNRWA/UNESCO department of education, where they provided technical assistance and guidance to UNRWA's vast education programme. The education programme had a target population of 398,000 Palestinian refugees attending over 640 schools and 8 training centres in Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic, as well as approximately 149,000 Palestinians residing in the occupied territories of the West Bank and Gaza. There was an elementary and preparatory education programme that followed the curricula of the host countries and covered the grades for which education was compulsory in each of those countries. There was also a two-year post-secondary vocational training programme and a two-year post-secondary technical education programme covering over 40 courses, in such subjects as auto mechanics and business practice, employing syllabuses developed by UNESCO and UNRWA staff. In addition, short-term courses in legal studies and fuel injection mechanics had been established in the occupied territories during the academic year 1992/93. The UNRWA/UNESCO Institute of Education in Amman, Jordan, was responsible for curriculum development and enrichment, in-service teacher training and educational research and testing. A priority area in that programme was the development and/or improvement of self-learning materials and remedial measures to compensate pupils and teachers in the occupied territories for the loss of classroom time sustained since the onset of the intifadah. The contribution of UNESCO to the

(Mrs. Dukuly-Tolbert, UNESCO)

cooperation programme also included fellowships, educational equipment and textbook review services.

66. In conformity with the resolutions and decisions of its governing bodies, UNESCO monitored the functioning of educational and cultural institutions in the occupied Arab territories. At its one hundred thirty-ninth session, the Executive Board had invited the Director-General to launch an appeal to the international community, at governmental and non-governmental level, for voluntary contributions in order to make good the deficit in the budget of the Palestinian universities caused by the protracted closure of those institutions and the current situation. At other sessions of the Executive Board and at the General Conference of UNESCO the Director-General had reported on the organization's concerns regarding educational and cultural institutions in the occupied territories.

67. On 22 January 1993, the Director-General had launched an appeal to Member States, international organizations and Arab and Islamic funding sources for voluntary contributions in order to make good the deficit in the budget of the Palestinian universities in the occupied territories. No positive responses to that appeal had been received to date.

68. In September 1992, representatives of UNESCO and of the Steering Committee of the Palestinian European Academic Cooperation in Education (PEACE) Programme had signed a cooperative agreement under which six Palestinian universities would be linked to 12 European universities as part of the UNITWIN project to benefit Palestinian universities. UNESCO had contributed $16,000 in seed money for that effort.

69. Through the Participation Programme, funds had been provided for preparatory activities for a Palestinian curriculum development centre. A workshop currently was being considered at which Palestinian educators and international experts would meet to discuss problems and strategies for the development of secondary school curricula.

70. In 1992, the United Nations Regional Office for Education in the Arab States (UNEDBAS) had signed three contracts with Al-Quds University, with the aim of preparing two studies on distance education for Palestinians and reinforcing documentation and study centres. In December 1992, UNEDBAS had conducted a seminar in Jerusalem attended by 43 representatives of non-governmental organizations, universities and United Nations organizations on the subject of enhancing the access of disadvantaged Palestinian children in the occupied territories to basic education.

71. Under its regular programme budget, UNESCO provided funds for equipment for Palestinian universities and for fellowships for Palestinian students. During the period 1992-1993, 13 fellowships had been awarded. In addition, four fellowships had been provided to date for 1992-1993 through the Participation Programme. Palestinian institutions had submitted 12 requests, for a total of $162,000, seven of which had been approved. Palestinian institutions had

(Mrs. Dukuly-Tolbert, UNESCO)

received a total of $93,000, to be utilized in the areas of culture, education and the social sciences and for four fellowships and emergency assistance to Jordan during the Gulf crisis.

72. At the one hundred twenty-ninth session of the Executive Board in 1988, UNESCO had been requested to carry out a study and analyse the needs of the Palestinian people in the organization's fields of competence, particularly in education. In March 1990, UNESCO had published the results of the study, entitled "Study on the needs of the Palestinian people in the field of education and training", covering general education, vocational and non-formal education, manpower training at the community college level and university training. In its conclusions, the study had proposed 10 major projects relating to education and training of the Palestinian people. Most elements of the projects still awaited funding.

73. Lastly, she summarized the assistance which UNESCO had provided to the Palestinian people in the field of culture and referred, inter alia, to a contribution of $16,000 for the preparation of an inventory of the Palestinian cultural heritage and a contribution of $25,000 for the translation of a study on Palestinian cultural identity. In the framework of the Participation Programme for 1994-1995, UNESCO would continue providing assistance to the Palestinian people, particularly for short-term training courses in the fields of museum management and the preservation of historical monuments and sites.

74. The CHAIRMAN suggested that the Committee should close the list of speakers in the general debate on Wednesday, 17 November 1993, at 6 p.m.

75. It was so decided.

AGENDA ITEM 88: QUESTIONS RELATING TO INFORMATION (continued) (A/48/21; A/C.4/48/L.17)

76. Mr. SANBAR (Assistant Secretary-General of the Department of Public Information) said that he had listened with interest to the statements by delegations in the Committee on Information. In the light of the questions raised in that Committee, he suggested that at its next session it should consider the initiatives and criteria adopted regarding the creation of new information centres and added that the Department of Public Information (DPI) would actively participate in the discussion of the question. As to the specific questions raised concerning the information operation at Bonn, DPI and the German Government were engaged in preliminary discussions and he would report on the matter at the next session of the Committee on Information.

77. The CHAIRMAN suggested that the Committee should consider and take decisions on the five proposals before it at the same time. If he heard no objection he would take it that the Committee agreed to follow that procedure.

78. Draft resolutions A and B and draft decisions I and II, contained in paragraphs 86 and 87 to 89 of document A/48/21, and the draft decision contained in document A/C.4/48/L.17, were adopted without a vote.

79. Mr. JERBAN (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) said that although the Committee had adopted the draft resolutions and decisions concerning agenda item 88 by consensus, he wished to express reservations regarding the appointment of Israel as a member of the Committee on Information, because his Government did not recognize that State.

80. Mr. ZAMANINIA (Islamic Republic of Iran) expressed reservations regarding draft decision II contained in paragraph 89 of the report of the Committee on Information because his Government did not recognize the State which was seeking to become a member of the Committee.

81. Mr. OMER (Sudan) said that he had reservations concerning paragraph 88 of the report and requested that they appear in the summary record of the meeting.

The meeting rose at 5.30 p.m.

UNITED NATIONS

General Assembly

FORTY-EIGHTH SESSION

Official Records

SPECIAL POLITICAL AND DECOLONIZATION COMMITTEE (FOURTH COMMITTEE)
19th meeting
held on
Thursday, 18 November 1993
at 3 p.m.
New York

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 19th MEETING

Chairman:	Mr. SENGWE (Vice-Chairman)	(Zimbabwe)
later:	Mr. KALPAGE (Chairman)	(Sri Lanka)

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In the absence of Mr. Kalpagé (Sri Lanka), Mr. Sengwe (Zimbabwe), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM 85: UNITED NATIONS RELIEF AND WORKS AGENCY FOR PALESTINE REFUGEES IN THE NEAR EAST (continued) (A/48/13 and Add.1 and Add.1/Corr.1, A/48/117-S/25428, A/48/132, A/48/253-S/26045, A/48/263-S/26078, A/48/275, A/48/284-S/26191, A/48/287-S/26201, A/48/372, A/48/373, A/48/374, A/48/375, A/48/376, A/48/377, A/48/410-S/26465, A/48/415-S/26473, A/48/431, A/48/474 and A/48/554)

1. Mr. SHAHEED (Syrian Arab Republic) said that the excellent report submitted by the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) (A/48/13) reflected all the efforts made by the Agency in behalf of the Palestine refugees, particularly in the areas of health and education, despite the difficult situation prevailing in the occupied territories and the lack of resources. He wished, however, to make some observations which, although repeated year after year, had not received the attention they deserved. The Syrian Arab Republic and other Arab countries which received Palestine refugees were providing them with a substantial volume of assistance and services, and they wanted the high cost of those activities to be taken into account. The 1994 budget of the Agency should be increased in order to increase services for refugees. In paragraph 35 of his report, the Commissioner-General had highlighted some aspects of the critical situation of the refugee families. The crisis of resources affected the refugees, inasmuch as the reduction of expenditure was made at their expense. Other solutions must be found; an appeal could be made to donors to increase their contributions, the Agency could be transferred to Beirut in order to save on expenses, local purchasing could be increased in order to take advantage of lower prices and an advantageous exchange rate, and unnecessary expenditures could be avoided. That was the only way to overcome the crisis and stop depriving the refugees of badly needed services.

2. Among the services which UNRWA provided to the Palestinians, the education programme was the most important. The problems occasioned by classroom crowding and old, inadequate buildings had been aggravated by the reduction of educational services as a result of the budgetary deficit of UNRWA. Furthermore, support should be provided to the Damascus Training Centre in order to enable it to receive more Palestinian students, student fees should be eliminated, and university scholarships should be increased.

3. With regard to health services, he stressed the need to guarantee health care for all refugees, in view of their difficult circumstances and the high cost of those services. Surgical procedures should be carried out free of charge. Social services should also be increased, loans should be provided, housing should be built, and income-generating activities should be carried out in order to improve the living conditions of the Palestine refugees.

4. His delegation was dissatisfied at the $19 million reduction in the proposed UNRWA budget for the Syrian Arab Republic for 1994-1995. That

(Mr. Shaheed, Syrian Arab Republic)

reduction would affect many aspects of the Agency's operations, while, at the same time, the budget for other countries had increased. Consequently, he requested that the proposed budget should be revised and that the same criteria should be applied to Syria as to other countries of the region.

5. The problem of Palestine refugees was essentially an international responsibility; the aid provided was not commensurate with the enormity of the tragedy brought about by the Israeli occupation. The problems of the Palestine refugees had persisted because Israel did not respect the rules of international law with regard to repatriation. More than 3 million refugees in Syria had not been able to return to their place of origin despite the provisions of General Assembly resolution 194 (III).

6. At the Madrid Peace Conference, the need for a just and comprehensive solution for the region based on the application of the pertinent Security Council and General Assembly resolutions had been recognized. All the countries of the world had welcomed the peace process, which was based on international law and on the procedure outlined at the Madrid Conference. The eleventh round of peace talks had been based on those principles, until the secret peace agreement on Gaza and Jericho, which departed from the aforementioned guidelines, had been revealed. Disregarding 50 years of struggle, Israel had tried to give the impression that those agreements would finally place the region on the threshold of peace and stability. His delegation was of the view that the agreements on Gaza and Jericho did not constitute a complete peace agreement, and that it was not fair to accuse those who criticized them or made an objective analysis of their negative aspects of being opposed to the overall peace process. Nor was it fair to ask countries to act as if the signing of that agreement had in fact brought peace to the region. Experience had shown that partial solutions did not lead to true and lasting peace. The time for empty words was over: they only served to justify the continuation of occupation. The victims and the aggressors now had a unique and historic opportunity to put an end to decades of destructive struggle, and they should make the most of it.

7. He wished to reiterate the need to strengthen cooperation between Syria and UNRWA until such time as a definitive solution could be found to the problem of the Palestine refugees, and until they could be guaranteed an opportunity to return to their place of origin.

8. Mr. SINHASENI (Thailand) expressed his appreciation for the comprehensive report of the Commissioner-General on the work of UNRWA which, since its establishment, had had to work under the discouraging political climate prevailing in the Middle East. In that regard, his delegation wished to pay tribute to the men who with their painstaking efforts and sacrifice had made possible the signing on 13 September 1993 of the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements for Gaza and Jericho. The Government of Thailand urged all parties to cooperate fully with one another, and undertook to monitor that positive development closely and to render its full support. Nevertheless, the services provided by UNRWA remained indispensable to the livelihood and well-being of the Palestine refugees. The Agency's role should

(Mr. Sinhaseni, Thailand)

now be focused on the implementation of an integrated programme of assistance, as part of the reconstruction and rehabilitation process.

9. His delegation commended UNRWA for the educational services it was providing to the Palestinian people, which would surely help to bring about greater popular participation in development. It was to be hoped that, with the recent agreement, education and training programmes would no longer be interrupted. The Agency's record in the area of health care, relief and social services was also admirable. That was particularly so since the demands on those services continued to increase as a result both of demographic growth and of vulnerable economic and social conditions.

10. Arms truce and political solution alone were not enough to generate economic and social well-being, which was the essential precondition for a just and lasting peace. The work of UNRWA had contributed significantly to the Palestinians' political struggle, and must be sustained. That was why his delegation was deeply concerned that the financial situation of the Agency would require it to reduce its services. Strenuous efforts should be made to raise additional funds in order to enable the Agency to cope with the increased demands and to improve its flexibility in responding to emergency situations. Thailand had made regular contributions to UNRWA, and would maintain the level of its support.

11. His delegation joined the Palestinian and Israeli peoples in hoping that the signing of the letter of mutual recognition between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government in Gaza and Jericho would bring to a close the lengthy chapter of pain and suffering in the Middle East.

12. Mr. ASHIKI (Japan) said that his country hoped that the Declaration of Principles signed by the PLO and Israel would be the first step towards a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East. It was important that all the parties involved in the process should act in good faith and receive the international community's full support. As Prime Minister Hosokawa had announced to the General Assembly, Japan intended to extend about $200 million in assistance to the Palestinian people over the following two years, including grant aid for food and medicine and concessional loans for infrastructure building. In addition, the Japanese Government had sent a team to the region to collect information on development needs.

13. Japan believed that the agreement between Israel and the PLO could produce a genuine peace dividend which would benefit both parties. It was therefore important that the international community should join efforts to improve the living standards of the inhabitants of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

14. During the transition period UNRWA would have an even more crucial role to play because it would be necessary to improve significantly the social and welfare services provided to the Palestinian people. To that end, Japan had decided to contribute $500,000 to the 1993 UNRWA expanded programme of assistance.

(Mr. Ashiki, Japan)

15. One of the most essential ingredients for successful self-government was human resources. Over the previous three years, the Government of Japan had financed the studies of more than 200 students through its higher-education scholarship programme. In 1993 it would be providing scholarships worth $10,000 each to 40 students.

16. The Palestine refugees in Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic who continued to require assistance should not be forgotten in the transition period. Consequently, the Government of Japan had decided to contribute $780,000 to the Baqa'a Girls' School in Jordan and to provide food aid valued at 1 billion yen to Palestine refugees through UNRWA. Moreover, it had sent vocational-training experts to the Wadi Seer Training Centre in Jordan and more recently to the UNRWA Training Centre in Damascus. Since 1985 more than 100 Palestine refugees had received vocational training in Japan.

17. The Government of Japan had responded to the Commissioner-General's appeal by increasing its cash contributions to UNRWA by $1 million. Its total contribution had risen to $12 million.

18. Ms. McKAY (Australia) said that the recent events in the Middle East presented UNRWA with new challenges and the prospect of a significantly expanded role, for which it was eminently qualified.

19. Within the past year in the occupied territory there had been acts of violence ranging from collective punishment of the Palestinian population to mass deportation and the imposition of curfews, with the consequent effects on schooling, medical services and the work of UNRWA itself. There had also been a high number of fatalities and an unprecedented deterioration in economic and social conditions which had culminated in Israel's closure of the occupied territory. At the same time, her delegation acknowledged the importance of the signing of the Declaration of Principles by Israel and the PLO.

20. UNRWA had carried out vital work in education which would be the foundation for the new self-governing territory and its administration. It should be pointed out that UNRWA programmes in education, health, relief and social services for the 1.7 million refugees in Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic were as vital as they had always been.

21. Australia was concerned that UNRWA had again failed to receive funding sufficient to deliver all parts of its planned programmes in 1993 and commended the Commissioner-General for his efforts to raise the needed funds. The significant reduction of the deficit from $28.5 million to some $4 million must be weighed against the cuts in some programmes and limitations in others. Her delegation welcomed the Commissioner-General's plans to look for more innovative ways to assist Palestine refugees and to evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of the Agency's programmes.

22. Australia, which had attended the international donors' conference to support the peace agreement, would provide $15 million over a period of three years for a range of development activities, including income generation,

(Ms. McKay, Australia)

training, health, sanitation and water resources, which represented an increase of 50 per cent in its assistance to Palestinians. A large proportion of that sum would be provided to UNRWA to support new and existing programmes.

23. Mr. ANSAY (Permanent Observer for the Organization of the Islamic Conference) said that the fact that UNRWA existed 43 years after its inception was in a sense indicative of the international community's failure to bring about a just and lasting solution to the plight of the Palestine refugees. However, it was encouraging that common sense and sagacity had prevailed and that specific and constructive measures were being taken to achieve peace in the Middle East.

24. UNRWA provided education, health care, relief, and social services and general assistance to 2.8 million registered Palestine refugees through a network of 632 schools, 104 health centres and numerous other facilities. Those activities, carried out by 20,000 staff members, benefited nearly 3 million people with a modest budget of $327 million. It should be pointed out that UNRWA was created solely for Palestine refugees because of the historical context of the problem of Palestine and that those refugees should receive assistance from the international community until the problem was resolved.

25. In spite of the recent events in the region, the Palestinian community hoped that the Agency's services would continue and possibly expand during the transition period. Certainly, the scope of UNRWA's role would be determined by the wishes of the parties concerned, particularly the Palestinians.

26. President Arafat, during his meeting with the Commissioner-General the previous month in Tunis, had said that UNRWA should expand its activities and carry on its traditional role. The Organization of the Islamic Conference also firmly believed that UNRWA should maintain ongoing programmes alongside its new ventures. In that context he stressed the recent announcement by the Commissioner-General in Vienna of a new Agency initiative, the peace implementation programme, to support the Middle East peace process. The programme's priorities were to improve the social and economic conditions of Palestine refugees in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and included major construction and development projects which would help create employment. The Commissioner-General's announcement that UNRWA would expand its loans programme to Palestinian businesses was also heartening.

27. It was commendable that during such a trying time UNRWA's projected cash shortfall of $28.5 million had been reduced to approximately $4 million, as a result of austerity measures and administrative savings as well as the new contributions recently pledged.

28. The international community should ensure that the Agency was supplied with the resources and moral support it needed. UNRWA's vital humanitarian assistance must continue, and therefore the Agency would continue to need the full assistance and support of Member States, particularly donor countries. Although UNRWA had been established as a temporary body, the Organization of the Islamic Conference and its 51 member countries considered the Agency to be the

(Mr. Ansay, Observer, Organization of the Islamic Conference)

most fitting humanitarian body to assist the Palestinian people during the transition period.

29. At their annual meeting, held in New York on 29 September 1993, the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the Organization of the Islamic Conference had expressed their deep appreciation for the commendable efforts made by the Commissioner-General, Mr. Ilter Türkmen, in the discharge of his responsibilities and had recommended the renewal of his mandate, in line with similar recommendations made by the Council of Foreign Ministers of the League of Arab States and the members of the UNRWA Advisory Commission.

30. Mr. AL HASSAN (Oman) said that from the time of its establishment UNRWA had earned great credit providing services to 2.8 million registered Palestine refugees and in his delegation's view it was the most appropriate agency for carrying out that function. Oman supported the measures taken by UNRWA with regard to the recent Middle East peace agreements.

31. Given that the refugee problem was a political one, he urged Israel to apply the relevant United Nations resolutions, particularly General Assembly resolution 194 (III), paragraph 11, and to respect the fourth Geneva Convention of 1949, under which the occupying Power was obliged to guarantee the safety of civilians in time of war.

32. The peace process initiated in Madrid had contributed to the signing of the Declaration of Principles and the mutual recognition between the PLO and Israel. In that connection, he hoped that the relevant resolutions would be implemented, adding that he supported the "land-for-peace" initiative, which he considered encouraging.

33. Despite the peace process, the situation in the Arab territories was deteriorating, as was clear from document A/48/13, the first paragraph of which he quoted. Many Israeli practices vitiated the safety of those inhabiting the occupied territories. The closure of the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem indicated the gravity of the situation. The report also gave a vivid picture of the illegal actions committed by Israel, such as the killings of Palestinians, the destruction of homes, deportations and arrests of thousands of people. In that connection, he quoted paragraphs 13 to 16 and 19 of the Commissioner-General's report. He also referred to paragraph 20, which described how UNRWA staff had been subjected to beatings, threats and detention. He therefore urged Israel to respect the immunity and privileges of Agency staff.

34. He hoped that resolutions relating to the situation would be implemented by international organizations and that measures would be taken to guarantee the safety of staff. In conclusion he stated that Oman had given constant moral and financial support to UNRWA, which he hoped would continue to provide its excellent services.

35. Mr. AL OTAIBI (Kuwait) pointed out that, despite the positive developments in the Middle East peace process, the Palestinian people were still suffering from difficult living conditions in the occupied territories and elsewhere. His delegation had carefully studied the report by the Commissioner-General of UNRWA (A/48/13) and had listened with interest when he had addressed the Committee at the time that consideration of the item had begun. Kuwait wished to place on record its concern over the Israeli practices mentioned in the report, which violated the most basic rights of the Palestinian people. The Israeli occupation forces continued to apply repressive policies and refused to comply with resolutions by international bodies. World public opinion could testify that the Palestinians were still subjected to arbitrary acts such as the demolition of their homes, curfews, forced deportations, the confiscation of goods and hardships of every kind.

36. Since its creation in 1949, in pursuance of General Assembly resolution 302 (IV), UNRWA had provided the almost 3 million Palestinians who lived in the Agency's five operational areas with numerous services on an emergency basis, above all in education and health. It had done so despite the fact that UNRWA staff had come up against enormous obstacles in carrying out their duties. Such obstacles had become greater and more serious as a result of the 1967 war and the Israeli occupation, which had led to more Palestinians having to move to neighbouring countries.

37. Kuwait felt deep sympathy for the Palestinian people and well understood the sufferings caused by an occupation, since it had itself suffered for seven months after the invasion of its territory by Iraq. That fact enabled Kuwaitis to appreciate what such an occupation by Israeli forces meant for Palestinians. Kuwait knew the atrocities and cruelties that invading troops could commit. Indeed, the atrocities committed by the Iraqis in the territory of Kuwait had not been directed only against Kuwaitis, but also against other Arab and non-Arab communities - including the Palestinian community, which was the largest - living in Kuwait at the time of the invasion. A large part of the Palestinian community had had to leave Kuwait as a result of the Iraqi invasion. It was estimated that some 250,000 people had had to flee from Kuwait for that reason, making the job of UNRWA even more complex. Meanwhile the climate in the region was tense, which had already had an effect on the services provided by UNRWA. All those circumstances made the need for international support still more pressing, in terms not only of financial assistance but also of efforts to find a comprehensive solution to the Palestine question, which was unquestionably the cause of the situation in which the refugees found themselves.

38. Kuwait welcomed the Declaration of Principles signed in Washington on 13 September between the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and Israel. The Declaration was a first step towards achieving a just and lasting peace in the region, in conformity with Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). The peace process initiated in Madrid, in which Kuwait had participated and continued to participate, should enable the Palestinian people to exercise their inalienable right to self-determination and to the establishment of a Palestinian state in its own territory; it should also lead

(Mr. Al Otaibi, Kuwait)

to Israel's withdrawal from all the territories it occupied and to the recognition of the right of all Palestinians to return to their homes, in conformity with General Assembly resolution 194 (III), paragraph 11.

39. Kuwait had taken part in the meeting of donor countries held in Washington in October 1993 and was committed to funding development projects in the Gaza Strip and Jericho. Details of such funding would be announced later. Kuwait reiterated its support for UNRWA's activities and was prepared to welcome any project or activity that might serve to resolve the difficult situation of the Palestine refugees.

40. Mr. Kalpagé (Sri Lanka) took the Chair.

41. Mr. ELARABY (Egypt) said that since the Middle East Peace Conference in Madrid it had been clear that the international community was on the way to finding a just and comprehensive solution of the Palestine question. The signing of the Declaration of Principles between the PLO and the Government of Israel represented a historic step forward towards resolving the problem of the Palestine refugees. It was, however, clear from the UNRWA report that the positive developments had not been accompanied by any corresponding improvement in the living conditions of the Palestinians. Neither the Palestinian refugees nor the Palestinians living in the occupied territories had seen their living conditions improve, while in the Gaza Strip in particular the situation could be seen to have worsened. The report of the Commissioner-General of UNRWA clearly showed that the economic and social situation in the occupied territories had deteriorated owing to the rise in violence. It was to be hoped that the signing of the Declaration of Principles by the PLO and Israel would lead to substantial changes in the situation of all Palestinians and to the ending of Israeli practices which violated the fourth Geneva Convention.

42. The positive developments in the Middle East peace process did not reduce the task of UNRWA, but instead made it more complex. The evolution of the situation would determine whether its activities and programmes should also be modified in order to improve living conditions for refugees. New problems must be solved and additional goals established, but there was no doubt that UNRWA, because of its long experience in the field and the specialized knowledge of its staff in all areas, would have an important role to play during the transition period between the signing of the Declaration of Principles and the holding of further negotiations leading to a final peace agreement. The Palestinian authorities should take full advantage of the experience and knowledge of UNRWA staff. Egypt hoped that, in consultation with the PLO, UNRWA would continue to play its valuable role in the occupied territories and to support the peace process. In that respect, Egypt would favour the transfer of some agency staff from Vienna to the occupied territories, in order to make UNRWA activities even more effective.

43. Although UNRWA had managed to reduce its budget deficit, the Government of Egypt believed that the international community should increase its financial support to enable the Agency to confront adequately its increasingly complex

(Mr. Elaraby, Egypt)

tasks in the fields of education, health, employment and food supply, among others, in the new situation arising as a consequence of the peace agreements. He hoped that all pledges for contributions made by the international community at the conference held in Washington in October 1993 would be fulfilled. The Agency had prepared over 100 projects for the establishment of the necessary infrastructure in Palestinian communities and for job creation, and the promised financial contributions must materialize in order for those projects to be executed.

44. Although the road to a just and lasting peace would not be an easy one and would require all the parties involved to modify their positions, it was to be hoped that the next report of UNRWA would reflect a more encouraging picture. The situation of Palestinians living outside the occupied territories, in Lebanon, Syria and other countries must not be overlooked. UNRWA should not execute new programmes and activities in the occupied territories at the expense of those directed towards Palestinians living outside those territories. Neglecting th- needs of those other Palestinian communities would have negative repercussions on the peace process.

45. Mr. ADNAN (Malaysia) said that his delegation had carefully studied the report of the Commissioner-General of UNRWA and found the work of the agency laudable. Despite the political progress achieved, much remained to be done. Malaysia had joined the international community in giving financial support to UNRWA and had made an initial pledge of $5 million to assist the Palestinian community in the rehabilitation and development of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, beginning with Jericho.

46. It was regrettable that, as indicated in the report of the Commissioner-General, loss of life among the Palestinian population in the period under review had been significantly higher than during the preceding period. Malaysia deplored the continuing deterioration of the socio-economic conditions of the Palestinians as a result of the closure of the Gaza Strip and West Bank by the Israeli authorities. That measure had affected not only the Palestinians but also UNRWA staff and activities. His delegation urged the international community to adopt measures to redress the situation.

47. Addressing the problems of refugees had never been an easy task, and there was no partial solution. The question of Palestinian refugees, in view of its long history and their geographical dispersion, posed great challenges to the international community, in particular to UNRWA. Malaysia hoped that the signing of the Declaration of Principles by the PLO and Israel would pave the way for further negotiations, and the final resettlement of the Palestinian refugees in their homeland. His Government supported the Commissioner-General's initiative to address the refugee problem within the framework of a final solution to the question of Palestine. All aspects of the resettlement process deserved careful consideration, and the authorities must recognize the right to citizenship of the persons displaced by the crisis. Malaysia supported the view

(Mr. Adnan, Malaysia)

of the Palestinian delegation that citizenship should be granted to every single Palestinian, including those displaced from the West Bank and Gaza Strip since 1967. UNHCR must be directly and totally involved in finding a solution to that question.

48. The resettlement would be successful only if the refugees were prepared to be resettled voluntarily in designated areas. They must be equipped and trained to reintegrate with the local population, both socially and economically. Thus, UNRWA efforts to provide education and training facilities should be strengthened. Malaysia, therefore, would maintain its regular contributions to UNRWA and stood ready to provide additional assistance in the development of training programmes, human resources and health-care services.

49. Mr. ABDELLAH (Tunisia) said that he had listened with interest to the report of the Commissioner-General of UNRWA (A/48/13) and had taken note of the activities being conducted by the agency in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria to alleviate the suffering of the Palestinian refugees and provide them with essential services and assistance in health and education.

50. The Committee was considering the work of the Agency in circumstances quite different from those of the previous year, the PLO and Israel having recognized each other and signed the Declaration of Principles for the establishment of a provisional autonomous government in the Gaza Strip and Jericho. The recognition of the rights of the Palestinian people, especially the right of refugees to return to their homes in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III), was a major step forward.

51. Until a solution to the Palestinian problem and a settlement of the conflict in the Middle East were found, on the basis of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and other relevant General Assembly resolutions, Israel should abandon its repressive practices against the Palestinians and fulfil its international commitments, especially the provisions of the Declaration of Principles. Only thus would the rights of the Palestinians be respected and the way be opened to peace in the region.

52. In support of the peace process, Tunisia had participated in the multilateral meetings and had hosted the fourth meeting of the working group on refugee questions, where it was agreed that a seminar on family issues would also be held in Tunisia in December 1993. The mission of UNRWA assumed greater importance than ever during the transition period, not only in its humanitarian aspects but in its economic and social aspects. Tunisia would continue to assist UNRWA as much as possible and urged the international community to ensure that it could continue its work during the transition period, which would be decisive for peace throughout the region.

53. Mr. ABOUL-NASR (Observer for the League of Arab States) said that despite hopes which had been raised by the Madrid Conference and the election of a new Government in Israel, the desired progress had not been achieved. The Commissioner-General's report confirmed that the situation of the Palestinians had continued to deteriorate owing to the repressive policies of the occupying Power, particularly curfews, illegal settlements and the confiscation of land, in violation of the relevant United Nations resolutions and the fourth Geneva Convention. Nevertheless, with the change in the situation it was to be hoped that the Government of Israel would implement Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and that lasting peace in the Middle East would be achieved.

54. It was likewise to be hoped that mutual recognition by the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Government of Israel and the signing of the Declaration of Principles would facilitate the search for a solution based on the exchange of land for peace. Steps must be taken to ensure that Israel withdrew from the occupied territories and that the Palestinians could exercise the right to return to their homeland and the right to self-determination.

55. The Arab League appreciated the work done by UNRWA under extremely difficult circumstances, including in particular, the lack of security for its staff members. He hoped that the steps to which he had just referred would facilitate the Agency's work and that the relocation of some of its offices to the area would increase the effectiveness of its programmes.

56. UNRWA would be performing a vital role during the transitional period until a lasting, peaceful settlement was achieved. It was therefore crucial that the international community should contribute generously to the Agency's budget so as to enable it to continue its assistance to Palestine refugees.

57. Mrs. DAPUL (Philippines) said that she had welcomed the signing of the Declaration of Principles by the Government of Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), which had been preceded by mutual recognition by their leaders. Her Government fully supported the peace process not only between the Palestinians and the Israelis, but also among the other Arab States and Israel. Although negotiations between the parties would be arduous, especially with regard to the question of Palestine refugees, they would lead to a final settlement of the conflict based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). Mention should be made in that connection of the results of the recent meeting in Tunisia at which the working group on refugee issues had dealt with questions relating to family reunification and assistance to Palestine refugees.

58. Negotiations among the parties should be accompanied by confidence-building measures, and would be successful only if the living conditions of the Palestinians improved. Her country therefore attributed great importance to the development of an economic and social infrastructure in the occupied territories. In that connection, it was pleased to note the pledges made by members of the international community; although it could not contribute

(Mrs. Dapul, Philippines)

financially to the reconstruction of Palestine, it was willing to participate in the process by sharing its expertise in the medical and engineering fields.

59. The recent developments would have an impact on UNRWA operations and programmes for Palestine refugees. Given its experience and the importance of its activities in the area, UNRWA had an important role to play in the economic and social development of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. It was therefore necessary to maintain and enhance the services provided by UNRWA, not only in the occupied territories but also in Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic. Her delegation hoped that the Agency's donor base could be broadened, and that given the new circumstances it would be able to continue its work in safety.

60. Mr. AL-SULTAN (Saudi Arabia) said that the Committee was considering the work of UNRWA in altered circumstances. Positive changes would lead to a new era in which the Agency would be able to carry out its programmes more effectively.

61. In his report (A/48/13), the Commissioner-General of UNRWA highlighted the sufferings of the Palestinians resulting from harassment by the Israeli Government and from its repressive practices. Israel should abandon such practices and comply with the United Nations resolutions on the question of Palestine. One of the Palestinians' most serious problems was that of the reunification of families. Only a small number of those who had been obliged to leave their homes as a result of the 1967 act of aggression had been able to return to their homeland, owing to restrictions on travel between Jordan and Gaza. The refugee problem could be solved only if the individuals concerned were permitted to return to their homes and if compensation was paid to those who did not wish to return, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III). He therefore urged Israel to abolish the restrictions and to assist UNRWA in fulfilling its humanitarian task, in order that the Palestinian people might live in its homeland in peace and security.

62. His country hoped that the peace negotiations and the agreements that had been reached, as well as the efforts of the international community, would lead to a lasting peace in the region. In the meantime, it was essential that UNRWA should continue its work.

63. Mr. ZIAUDDIN (Bangladesh) said that since its establishment, UNRWA had provided services to more than 2.8 million Palestine refugees in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip who for the past four decades had been living in extremely difficult conditions. Although the Commissioner-General's report indicated that conditions could get worse and that the settlement of the refugee problem was still remote, it was to be hoped that the exchange of letters of recognition by the Governments of Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization, as well as the signing of the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements would benefit all parties in the region.

(Mr. Ziauddin, Bangladesh)

64. His Government believed that peace and security in the occupied territories and in the Middle East ultimately lay in the solution of the question of Palestine refugees and in a just and fair settlement of the Middle East problem within the framework of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). If the Peace Accords were to be successful, the Palestinians must be given an opportunity to improve their well-being, and to develop a sound socio-economic infrastructure in the affected areas. That would not only help to sustain the foundation of a Palestinian nation but also ease political tensions, thereby promoting the cause of peace and stability. UNRWA should continue to play an important role in the reconstruction and rehabilitation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, as well as neighbouring areas where Palestinians had taken refuge. The international community should wholeheartedly support UNRWA short-term projects on education, health clinics, relief and social services, which would improve physical and social services infrastructure and create new employment opportunities for the estimated 40 per cent of the workforce which had been left idle since the closure of the occupied territories in March. Although the needs of Palestine refugees in Lebanon, Jordan and Syria must be duly recognized, it was essential to give priority to projects designed to improve the living conditions of Palestine refugees in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Financial support was needed for the timely completion of all the ongoing and proposed projects. The Agency's financial prospects for 1993 were a cause for concern, especially since the growth in the level of contributions had not been keeping pace with the growth in the number of UNRWA programmes, the higher demand for basic services and rising costs. The adoption of austerity measures would have an adverse effect on the sensitive political and economic climate of the region, endangering the fragile peace process. It was therefore important that major donors should increase their contributions and support for UNRWA during that crucial period, and that all concerned should be punctual in making their contributions.

65. The important agreements reached recently between the Palestine Liberation Organization and Israel were a turning-point in the history of the hitherto war-torn and tension-ridden region. In order to move the process along to its final culmination, everything possible must be done to support the Agency's humanitarian and development activities aimed at improving the well-being of the Palestinian people.

66. Mr. LOTFI (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that since the establishment of UNRWA in 1949, the Palestinian people had continued to live in deplorable conditions in the occupied territories; according to the report of the Commissioner-General (A/48/13), collective punishment, involving curfews, punitive demolition, the sealing of houses and other practices, such as the shooting of anti-tank rockets against Palestinian homes, had continued, which was a matter of grave concern. The report stated that the number of injuries and deaths, particularly among children, had increased. It also described the alarming conditions in which Palestinian refugees lived and the aggressive actions taken by the Israeli authorities. Iran believed that such acts of

(Mr. Lotfi, Islamic Republic of Iran)

aggression against refugees violated all international norms and should be condemned by the international community.

67. Education could play an important role in improving the scientific, social and economic aspects of the lives of people in the occupied territories; accordingly, his delegation was concerned at the policies and practices of the occupying authorities which had prolonged the closure of educational institutions in the territories.

68. The safety of UNRWA staff was of crucial importance. The Israeli security forces had shot and killed two Agency staff members in the Gaza Strip and were continuing to subject the staff to mistreatment involving beatings, threats, insults, intimidation and temporary detention. The international community should condemn those actions.

69. Socio-economic conditions in the occupied territories were also a source of concern. The confiscation of land had continued, and Palestinians continued to have less access to water resources than settlers. UNRWA required the continued support of the international community in order to improve the living conditions of the Palestinian people. The Islamic Republic of Iran was continuing to make its annual contribution to the Agency. The Palestinian people expected the international community to help it to achieve its inalienable rights, including the right of all refugees to return to their homeland and the right to establish an independent State in Palestine.

70. Mr. GORDON (Israel) said that his delegation shared the hopes and views expressed in the preface and the letter of transmittal of the report of the Commissioner-General of UNRWA (A/48/13), since the exchange of letters on recognition and the signing of the Declaration of Principles by the PLO and the Government of Israel marked a turning-point in the region in general and in the West Bank and Gaza Strip in particular. It was to be hoped that the era covered by the report was gone forever, and that the information provided would be evaluated in the context of the developments in the peace process. The accusations, polemics, bitterness and rhetoric of the past should be put aside in order to build a better future.

71. His delegation also shared the view expressed by the Commissioner-General concerning the good working relationship and the spirit of understanding arrived at between Israel and UNRWA in promoting the economic and social advancement foreseen in the agreement. Israel had extended full cooperation to the United Nations bodies which were providing assistance to the inhabitants of the territories, including UNRWA, and to the task force assigned by the Secretary-General, and trusted that, despite some dissonant voices, it would be possible, when the current session of the General Assembly was over, to say that it had been the first session to be held in the era commencing with the signing of the agreement between Israel and the PLO.

(Mr. Gordon, Israel)

72. In accordance with the Declaration of Principles, the question of the 1948 refugees would be discussed within the framework of the permanent status negotiations, which would commence no later than the beginning of the third year of the interim period (Declaration of Principles, art. V, para. 2).

73. The modalities for the admission of persons displaced from the West Bank and Gaza Strip in 1967 would be decided by means of an agreement to be concluded by a committee consisting of representatives of Israel, the Palestinians, Jordan and Egypt (Declaration of Principles, art. XII).

74. The readmission of former Palestinian residents who had overstayed their permits abroad would be discussed in the bilateral negotiations with Jordan.

75. Israel had agreed to approve 2,000 cases of reunification (involving some 5,000 individuals) per year on family and humanitarian grounds. That was an ongoing process. In addition, his Government had agreed that some 6,000 Palestinians who were on temporary visits and who had remained beyond the date authorized in their original permits would be accorded permanent residence status.

76. Israel had released and would continue to release significant numbers of Palestinian prisoners and detainees and would allow them to return to their homes. Deportees would also be allowed to return. That subject was being discussed within the framework of the negotiations currently taking place between Israel and the PLO concerning the Gaza Strip and Jericho area.

77. The agreement on the Declaration of Principles had created a climate conducive to unprecedented progress in the economic sphere. Various development projects, in such areas as communications, transport, energy, tourism, agriculture, financial markets, investment, trade, vocational training, regional networks and construction, had been discussed and agreed on; they would contribute to the economic prosperity of the region and would create many jobs.

78. The entire region had embarked on a clearly defined road to reconciliation and reconstruction. However, there were numerous difficulties ahead, and greater efforts must be made to overcome them.

79. Mr. MALONE (Canada) said that there had never been a time in the history of UNRWA when its work could be discussed with so much hope; his delegation applauded the courageous steps taken by the Israelis and the Palestinians through their mutual-recognition agreement and Declaration of Principles. His delegation also welcomed with satisfaction the signing of the common agenda by Jordan and Israel and hoped that similar measures would be taken by Syria and Lebanon, so that a just, comprehensive and lasting peace could be achieved in the region, on the basis of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

(Mr. Malone, Canada)

80. As outlined in the Declaration of Principles, authority would be transferred to the Palestinians in such areas as education and culture, health and social welfare. UNRWA was particularly well qualified to assist the Palestinians in providing essential services and in developing their economy and institutions.

81. Every effort must be made to demonstrate to the Palestinians and Israelis that peace offered more opportunities than conflict. To that end, international financial support was essential. At the international donors' conference held in Washington, D.C., Canada had pledged $55 million over a period of five years to support peace in the Middle East. Canada welcomed the first meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee established at that conference, as well as the Copenhagen Action Plan developed by the regional economic development working group of the multilateral peace process. If assistance was to be effective, it must be focused and coordinated.

82. Canada welcomed the active participation of UNRWA in the multilateral working group on refugees, whose essential responsibility was to improve the living conditions of refugees. At the Working Group's most recent meeting in Tunis, the United Nations had submitted a valuable inter-agency initiative combining the efforts of UNRWA, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) on behalf of Palestinian children and youth. Canada had supported that initiative, and now took the opportunity to invite Member States to join in the project. The Tunis meeting had stressed that the refugee communities in Jordan, Lebanon and Syria must not be overlooked.

83. Canada was deeply concerned by the chronic and critical shortfall in the funding of UNRWA over the years, and it urged countries that had not contributed financially to the work of the Agency to do so at that critical juncture in the peace process. His delegation looked forward to the success of the new agreements and of others to come, and to the establishment of new Palestinian institutions, which would enable UNRWA finally to complete the task it had been given 40 years earlier.

84. Mr. AL-MERRIE (United Arab Emirates) said that UNRWA had performed nobly in assisting the 2.8 million registered Palestine refugees. The Agency's operations during the period covered by the report had included educational and health services, relief and social services, the construction of new schools and the expansion of clinics to help disadvantaged Palestinians, notwithstanding the serious financial difficulties the Agency was experiencing.

85. However, his delegation deplored the measures adopted in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip by the Israeli military authorities, who had committed acts of aggression against UNRWA personnel, threatening them and temporarily detaining them. Some UNRWA staff members had also been deported, provoking protests by the Agency. In March 1993, closures in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip had caused the economic and social conditions of the Palestinians to deteriorate

(Mr. Al-Merrie, United Arab Emirates)

seriously and intensified the unemployment problem. Also, the demolition of houses had reduced the level of assistance.

86. In resolution 302 (IV), adopted in 1949, the General Assembly had established UNRWA to assist the Palestinians expelled from their homes by Israel in 1947 and 1948. At that time, the impression had been that the problem of the Palestine refugees would be resolved in a short time. Yet their plight had endured for more than 40 years as a result of Israel's refusal to implement General Assembly resolution 194 (III), in clear violation of the fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War. Israel had also not complied with the other relevant General Assembly resolutions, including resolution 47/69 of 14 December 1992, despite the approaches made by the international community.

87. To resolve the financial situation of UNRWA, all countries and relief agencies must adopt collective measures as soon as possible. Otherwise, the Agency would not be able to carry out all the programmes it was planning, both immediately and in the future, in order to improve the living conditions of the Palestinian people.

88. Mr. ALAMUDDIN (Lebanon) said that the item on Palestine refugees had remained on the General Assembly's agenda for 44 years, but that the situation of the refugees had not improved. On the contrary, their tragic plight had continued to deteriorate, even after the signing of the Declaration of Principles by the PLO and Israel. The situation of the refugees was a consequence of the Israeli practices in the occupied territories, which constituted patent violations of the relevant resolutions of the United Nations and of international conventions and treaties. The recent Israeli aggression against villages in southern Lebanon was a clear indication that Israel still intended to maintain a climate of violence in the region.

89. Lebanon was ready to continue participating in the peace talks between Israel and the Arab countries which had been going on for the last two years and to facilitate full implementation of the results of the talks. However, if the peace process was to end in clear success, the situation of the Palestine refugees must be borne in mind, and a just and lasting solution to the problem must be found. The solution of the problem of the refugees was a basic element in the overall solution to the entire question of Palestine. A comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the problem of the Palestine refugees must be found on the basis of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 425 (1978), and it must include as an absolute prerequisite the withdrawal of Israel from all the occupied Arab territories. Lebanon rejected any attempt to relocate Palestine refugees in Lebanese territory. The relocation in Lebanon of Palestine refugees would be a violation of the sovereignty and integrity of the Lebanese State.

90. With respect to the activities of UNRWA, Lebanon continued to be the country of asylum for a great number of Palestine refugees, to whom it provided assistance of all kinds, despite its limited resources owing to the post-war conditions in his country for over 16 years. Lebanon was continuing to pay a

(Mr. Alamuddin, Lebanon)

high price in economic terms and in terms of human life as a consequence of Israel's occupation of the southern sector of its territory. Despite the hope of the Commissioner-General of UNRWA that the current report would be the last and that the situation of the Palestine refugees could soon be resolved, his delegation believed that the Israeli practices since the signing of the Declaration of Principles by the PLO and Israel did not confirm that hope, and it was necessary to continue making sustained efforts to resolve the tragic situation of the Palestine refugees once and for all. The Commissioner-General's report indicated the obstacles to the work of UNRWA as a result of the measures adopted by Israel in the occupied territories. In that connection, Lebanon stressed that the UNRWA headquarters should return to Beirut, in compliance with the relevant General Assembly resolutions, taking into account the fact that stable security conditions now prevailed in that city, where the Agency could carry out its work with greater ease and at less expense. Other agencies of the United Nations system had once again established their offices in Beirut, and UNRWA should follow their example. The Commissioner-General himself stated in his report that the general situation in Lebanon had improved since the election of the new Government.

91. Mr. AL-ZAYANI (Bahrain) said that, since the beginning of the peace process in the Middle East three years earlier, a new hope had sprung up of finally achieving a solution to the question of Palestine. That hope had recently been confirmed by the signing by the PLO and Israel of the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements. However, the Declaration was only a first step towards a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the question, which would have to be based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).

92. The agreements signed by the PLO and Israel would greatly affect the work of UNRWA, which would become more complex and difficult and require more funds. With its over 40 years of experience in activities in the field, the Agency would have an essential function to perform when the agreements were implemented.

93. Despite the great discrepancy between the Agency's funds and the needs it must meet, it had made appreciable progress in improving the effectiveness of its programmes and activities.

94. The Working Group on the Financing of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East had expressed concern over the lack of funds for 1992 and 1993, especially for the fund for Extraordinary Measures in Lebanon and the Occupied Territories (EMLOT). The Commissioner-General and the Working Group had also expressed concern over the shortfall for 1993 and 1994. Bahrain hoped that the Agency would find the funds needed to carry on its activities.

95. Mr. TÜRKMEN (Commissioner-General of UNRWA) expressed appreciation for the delegations' support and said that the Agency would perform the task the Committee assigned to it during the transition period.

The meeting rose at 6.05 p.m.